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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a discussion of multicultural policies in Canada, implications for teachers and schools, multicultural resources, and heritage language education. A case study of an elementary school in North York, a borough of metropolitan Toronto (Ontario, Canada), illustrates the positive effects that can accrue when a multicultural approach to teaching is adapted. The practice of heritage language instruction in Canada is addressed and focuses on the problems and attempted solutions in Ontario where heritage language teaching is integrated into the regular curriculum. This means that core curriculum subjects will be taught in the students' native language in order to best ensure success of immigrant students later in the educational system, and that such language instruction is available not only to specific ethnic groups but to all children who wish to take avantage of extra language instruction. In order to prepare qualified teachers competent in an official language (French or English) as well as in heritage languages and comfortable in a multicultural framework, teacher training programs need to provide up-to-date techniques and theories of second language teaching. (LL)

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Multicultural Education: A Canadian Perspective

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Multicultural Education: A Canadian Perspective

-Suzanne Majhanovich

In this paper, I propose first to discuss briefly multicultural policies in Canada and their implications for teachers and schools. By way of illustration, I will present a brief case study of an elementary school in North York, a borough of Metropolitan Toronto to show the positive effects than can accrue when a multicultural approach to teaching is adapted.

In a second part of the paper, I will discuss an aspect of multicultural education that has proven to be promising but contentious; namely, instruction in heritage languages. There, I will outline practices across the country in offering heritage languages focussing on Ontario--the problems it faces in this area and attempts at solutions.

I Multiculturalism in Canada--Policies

Although Canada has always been a culturally pluralistic society, the pluralism was only really acknowledged officially in 1969 in Volume 4 of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism: The Cultural Contributions of Other Ethnic Groups. By 1971, there was a government multicultural Policy in place to be overseen by a Minister of State responsible for Multiculturalism and two advisory bodies: the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism and the Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee. By 1987, the Multiculturalism Bill, C-93 was proposed as "an act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada."

This Bill finally received royal assent in 1990. It has been viewed by some factions in the country with suspicion, but represents an attempt to recognize that within the framework of official bilingualism, the multicultural heritage of Canadians should be preserved and enhanced. (See Section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.)

These policies could provide valuable opportunities for education in Canada, although the fact that education lies in the domain of individual provinces rather than under federal jurisdiction has proven somewhat problematic. Different provinces, however, according to ethnic make-up have approached multicultural education mindful of the needs and demands of the population.

Teaching Multiculturalism

Multicultural education does appear in various guises and in various areas of the curriculum across Canada. Often, it is implemented through units integrated into the regular curriculum, heritage days during which students bring and display treasured artifacts representing their origins, guest speakers, demonstrations of ethnic cooking and folk dances, and the like. This approach to multiculturalism can be informative as long as it does not stereotype the groups being represented. If presented in the entire school, curriculum activities of this nature at least have the advantage that they present to pupils in general the diversity of Canada's populace rather than simply teaching certain groups about their individual heritage while ignoring the rich

mosaic provided by others. The latter treatment of culture could occur in homogeneous classes devoted to the preservation of the culture of a particular ethnic group, and hence could not be classified as multiculturalism. That is not to deny the right of individual groups to preserve and transmit their own heritage; it is simply not enough to relegate culture teaching to specific groups alone to the exclusion of others. In keeping with the spirit of Canada's multicultural society, everyone should have the opportunity to become informed about cultural pluralism in the country.

As long as multicultural education proceeds from commonalities among cultures and stresses cooperative ventures that have taken place rather than focussing on confrontations or features that might appear alien to the majority group, there is an opportunity for the development of tolerance and understanding among different ethnic groups. Once students feel comfortable with what particular cultural groups have to offer, they will be more prepared to examine differences in an unbiased way. This implies that teachers too should have an understanding of cultural diversity. It has been suggested (Ray, 1991) that in the context of the teaching profession, ideal candidates might well have experienced life in another culture, and have studied a foreign language. Such candidates with personal experience in adjusting and adapting to other cultures would be best able to meet the demands of multi-ethnic classrooms as well as explain cultural pluralism. In many ways, successful multicultural education entails an ability to put

oneself "in another person's shoes."

Multicultural Resources

Since it is not always possible to find teachers cognizant of ethnic diversity and how to present it, education authorities across Canada have produced guides to assist teachers in multicultural teaching. The Ontario Ministry of Education, for example, has developed a number of guidelines pertaining to intercultural education: Canada's Multicultural Heritage, 1977; People of Native Ancestry, 1975, 1977, 1981; and Black Studies, 1983, to name a few. Textbooks, before receiving official approval are reviewed to ensure that no cultural or racial bias is evident. Moreover, a policy an race relations within schools is currently under preparation and already exists for some boards with large immigrant or multiracial populations. Journals and scholarly publications are also available as resources for teachers and teacher educators.[1]

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[1]Of the many publications which can serve as useful resources for teaching multiculturalism, the following Canadian journals are of particular interest to teachers: TESL Canada Journal, Multiculturalism/Multiculturalisme, and Volume 47, No 4 (June, 1991) of The Canadian Modern Language Review, an issue devoted entirely to heritage languages including "A resource guide for Heritage Language Instruction: An annotated listing of projects supported by Multiculturalism and Citizenship" pp 712-785. Two recent publications used in teacher education that are particularly useful are Social Change and Education in Canada Second Edition, edited by Ratna Ghosh and Douglas Ray (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991) and Innovative Multicultural Teaching edited by Vincent D'Oyley and Stan M. Shapson (Kagan and Woo Ltd., 1990) with sections on Multiculturalism within Subject Domains, Special Contexts for Multicultural Teaching, and Curric ulum Building and Evaluation for Multiculturalism.

The Case of Flemington Road School

Undoubtedly sound multicultural education can be difficult to provide, but it is not impossible. What it takes is cooperation between the community and the school, as well as determination and commitment to multiculturalism by the school administration and staff.

One success story of a school that seems to be meeting the challenge of education in a pluralistic society was related by Marni Price in a Federation Newsletter in the Fall of 1991 (Price, 1991). The school is Flemington Road and it is situated in a subsidized housing area of North York, the largest borough of Metropolitan Toronto. The school's population is primarily black, made up largely of Canadian born blacks with Caribbean parents (although some families are from the United States or can count several generations in Canada). There are also children of Vietnamese, Chinese, South Asian, Central and South American and Iranian-Canadian descent. Most parents speak English as a second language or dialect.

The school is a happy, productive place today but such was not always the case, Ms. Price reports. In 1985, the building was run down, parents were made to feel unwelcome in the school. In any case, they had little faith in the ability of the school to educate their children for anything more than the lowest streams in high school, and behaviour problems among students were rampant. The difficulties seemed to stem from the school staff's inability to understand the needs of the students or to deal with racial and

ethnic diversity (p. 25). In 1985, with almost 75% of the school population comprised of black students, only one staff member was a member of a visible minority. In 1985, a new principal and vice-principal were assigned to the school. The principal, Hugh McKeown had been a co-writer of the local board's policy on race and ethnic relations and previously had supervised heritage language programs for the board. Madge Logan, then vice-principal and subsequently principal of the school by 1987 was particularly interested in issues of race and poverty in education, and was herself an émigré from the Caribbean. With these administrators came other new staff members and together they began to implement changes in the school. To begin with, parents were welcomed to the school and encouraged to use the school in off hours for community events. Teachers made contact with each parent and informed them that homework would be assigned, and the books from the library were available to start a home reading program. Literacy development was accorded high priority. Parents were encouraged to read with their children and ensure them time to complete school work at home. Kindergarten teachers visited parents to inform themselves of their pupils' lifestyles and to get to know the parents. Parent-teacher-student meetings were organized with babysitting provided. As the ethnic mix of the staff changed, people were available to interpret for parents whose English skills were weak. Perhaps most importantly, new staff received extensive in-service training in anti-racist education, relevant curriculum content and delivery for multicultural classrooms. New disciplinary strategies were put

into place. In the past, teachers had simply assumed that behaviour problems arose because of emotionally and economically impoverished home lives. They really did not expect that the children could learn much so they had low expectations for them and simply tried to "love them to death," as Madge Logan put it. All that changed with a new behaviour code. Teachers made children aware that they were in school to learn and teachers expected them to learn. They made sure the children understood the high and rigorous expectations for them. School became a place the children were proud of and had some ownership in. They now participated in events like morning announcements for example, and a steel band was set up for the music program.

The curriculum was adjusted to reflect more the culture of the school. The library now contains bilingual volumes in English/Farsi, English/Spanish, and English/French so that the non-English speaking parents can share in their child's learning experiences. Books that contained biased and out-dated material; prejudiced or stereotyped depiction of any race, ethnic background, religion, socio-economic class or sex were identified and replaced (p. 28). Teachers were encouraged to change the curriculum and pedagogy to be more culturally sensitive. That meant, for example, that science units now include black inventors, social studies unit treat black settlements in Ontario.

Community needs were not ignored. A breakfast program for children with working parents was instigated along with an ESL program for parents as well as a daycare centre. Students visit

high schools and universities so they will know what to expect when they get there (not if they get there). Flemington Road School proves that ethnic, cultural and economic diversity can be a positive force in education; that multicultural education can and does work if the will and understanding is there to make it work. It is to be hoped that other schools will follow Flemington Road's excellent example.

II Heritage Language Education

I would now like to turn to the second part of my paper dealing with heritage languages as a reflection of multiculturalism in Canada. First, I will provide an overview of heritage language education across Canada.

The prairie provinces, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta have a relatively large percentage of their populations whose mother tongue in neither French nor English (Canada's two official languages). Manitoba has had Ukrainian and Mennonite German schools since the nineteenth century. Alberta supports Ukrainian, Jewish, and German bilingual schools in which about 50% of the instruction is given in the heritage language, the rest in English (Majhanovich and Ray, 1991).

The province of Quebec has viewed Canadian multicultural policies with suspicion, since it believes that every effort must be made to protect its own québécois culture and language. Quebec teacher federations have opposed the teaching of ancestral and heritage languages on the grounds that such instruction would

interfere with the objective of assimilating immigrant groups into the francophone milieu. Nevertheless, since the late 1970´s, Quebec has had in place a heritage language program called PELO (Programme d´enseignement des langues d´origine). This program was actually developed by the government to encourage the immigrant populations to integrate into the francophone milieu while maintaining their ancestral languages, since typically, newly arrived immigrants to Quebec opted for the Quebec English school system rather than the French one. PELO offered an incentive to immigrant parents to choose French rather than English acculturation in their new country (M. AcAndrew, 1991).

The maritime provinces have been less involved in heritage language education although Nova Scotia has encouraged Gaelic in a few locations. Because of the large Black population in Nova Scotia, their approach has been to encourage intercultural/interracial education.

British Columbia has only recently begun to formulate policies with regards to heritage langauge instruction. Among the recommendations being considered are the encouragement of program design, access to heritage language classes to be integrated into the regular school day, the establishment of advisory committees to monitor development, implementation, and maintenance of heritage language programs (Beynon and Toohey, 1991).

It is interesting that British Columbia is considering integrating heritage language programs into the regular school day. That may mirror current practice in Alberta or may address an issue

that Ontario, the most populous province, and the one with the largest immigrant population, has been trying to address with regard to its heritage language programs. Since 1977, the Ontario Ministry of Education has permitted the instruction of heritage language programs wherever requested by a group of parents (more recently, where requested by as few as 25 parents). The Ontario program has been in answer to pressure from its immigrant population, but on close examination, has not represented a serious effort to promote heritage languages. The programs comprise two and one half hours per week, and for the most part, are taught after school hours or on weekends. Aside from Ministry funding granted directly to Boards of Education, the programs themselves are the sole responsibility of local boards which may decide on the qualifications (if any) of instructors, and on curriculum development and guidelines. In fact, until recently, teachers could only become qualified in the more "traditional" languages (besides English and French)--German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish, and then for the secondary level only. A 1990 curriculum document, International Languages, will now mean that the Ministry recognizes up to 66 international languages for instruction at the secondary level. and that teachers may become qualified to teach them. The International Languages document, incidentally, does not include native languages which are treated in a separate curriculum guideline. Still, this document does not deal with heritage languages taught in elementary school, and thus, official guidelines and programs are still lacking for that level.

Nevertheless, the heritage language program is very popular, attracting over 90,000 children enrolled in fifty-eight different languages.

The contentious issue about heritage languages has arisen in large boards like Toronto with a huge immigrant population. There, trustees decided to incorporate the heritage language program into the regular school day, and have even suggested that new immigrants be taught first in their native langauge before starting ESL classes. Teachers have complained about the lengthened school day, and have expressed concern that delaying ESL instruction for newcomers may jeopardize immigrant students' success in the system. However, research by Danesi (1991) and Cummins (1979, 1984), has suggested that strong support for heritage languages including their integration into the regular school day where core curriculum will be taught in the heritage language, at least in the beginning, will best ensure success of immigrant students later in the educational system. In fact, Danesi suggests that bilingual education has positive transfer effects for all aspects of the curriculum. In any case, the integration of heritage language teaching into the regular curriculum has meant that such language instruction is available not just to the particular ethnic group as is usually the case with heritage languages taught outside of school, but that all children who wish may take advantage of extra language instruction. There are cases of Toronto schools were children of all backgrounds are learning along with the regular curriculum, Mandarin Chinese and Polish through the heritage

language program.

The challenge now lies in the preparation of qualified teachers competent in an official language as well as in heritage languages, and comfortable in a multicultural framework. I mentioned above the resource guide cited in Vol 47, NO. 4 of the Canadian Modern Language Review. From that compilation, it is clear that already a great deal of work has been done in curriculum development for individual heritage languages as well as in teacher training. Unfortunately, these activities have been disbursed all over the country; one hopes there is not too much rediscovery of the wheel. What is needed is a central clearing house for materials as well as some assurances that courses in pedagogy offered for the various languages are indeed providing up to date techniques and theories of second language teaching. There should be some way of ensuring that the instructors have appropriate competence in the language they are teaching. Perhaps the proficiency guidelines prepared by ACTFL could provide some common standards. Obviously more work needs to be done on cooperative curriculum planning and sequencing, the development of instructors who can teach language in context, and on methods of evaluating programs so that the Heritage Language programs may at last be recognized for credit at the secondary level.

In conclusion, there are many pitfalls to be avoided in the development of relevant multicultural and heritage language education. Given the pluralism of our society, such education cannot be avoided. If the challenges are met, all students will

benefit.

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